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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
27 October 1966

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HIGHLIGHTS

Premier Ky has told the US Embassy that he has obtained the agreement of four of the seven dissident cabinet ministers to remain in the government.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
Light contact between US and Communist forces was reported in Quang Tri Province as US Marines of Operation PRAIRIE trapped 40 enemy troops just south of the DMZ (Para. 1). Nearly 50 Viet Cong were killed as a result of two ARVN operations in the Mekong River Delta area (Para. 2). Viet Cong guerrillas attacked the Plei Me Special Forces Camp with mortars on 26 October (Para. 3). A Viet Cong defector says B-52 raids cause more fear than loss of life (Paras. 4-5).

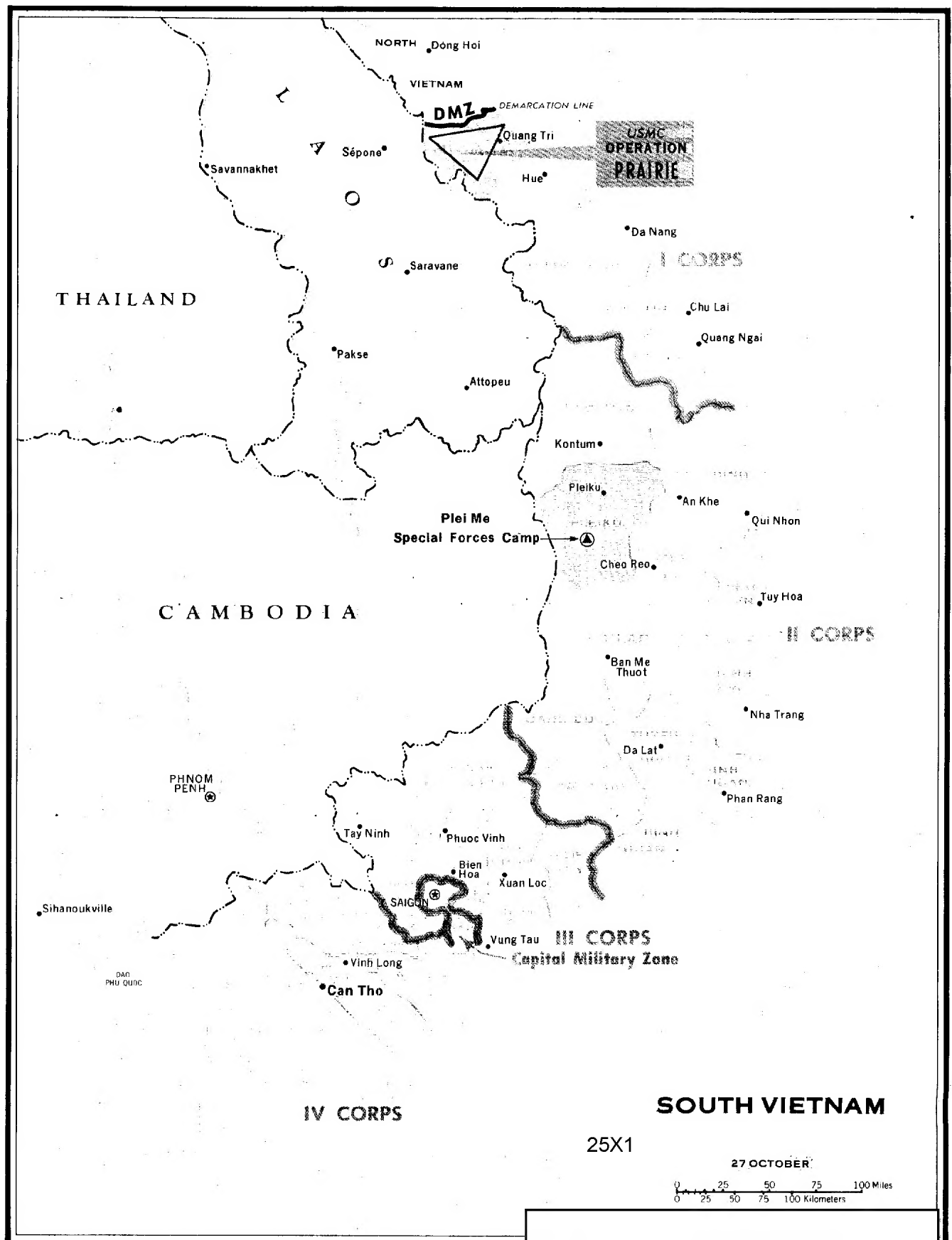
Annex: The Structure of VC/NVA Military Region 5 (Paras. 1-6).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Premier Ky told a US Embassy official on 27 October that four of the seven dissident cabinet ministers have agreed to remain in the government (Paras. 1-2). The Constituent Assembly completed its election of permanent officers on 27 October without any militant southern regionalists or hard-line antigovernment members being elected to top posts (Paras. 3-6).

III. North Vietnamese Military Developments:
Indications of southward movement of the two regiments of the NVA 341st Division are reported (Paras. 1-3). A US destroyer fired on four unidentified coastal craft along the coast of North Vietnam on 27 October.

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: AFP has quoted the new Liberation Front representative in Cairo as stating that the Front will "soon" establish a government in South Vietnam (Paras. 1-2). Raul Castro's comments on aid to North Vietnam in a 27 October Pyongyang speech are reported. (Paras. 3-5).



I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Elements of a US Marine battalion participating in Operation PRAIRIE in South Vietnam's northernmost province of Quang Tri trapped a Communist force of approximately 40 troops on 26 October. The marines called in artillery and air support after catching the enemy unit in a cross fire in the rugged hill and jungle area just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Preliminary reports indicate three Americans were killed and 19 wounded. Enemy losses were six killed. Later, another patrol discovered a cave and tunnel complex and apprehended 163 Communist suspects.

2. Nearly 50 Viet Cong were killed as a result of two South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) operations in the Mekong River Delta area near Can Tho. In one engagement, four ARVN battalions established contact early on 27 October with an enemy force of undetermined size and suffered casualties of 18 killed and 67 wounded. The other encounter developed during an 11-hour ARVN search-and-destroy operation on 26 October during which only one ARVN soldier was reported killed.

3. The Viet Cong launched a ten-minute mortar attack on the Plei Me Special Forces Camp in the central highlands of Pleiku Province on 26 October. US aircraft supported the camp's defenses causing the attacking force to retreat. There were no reports of casualties.

Viet Cong Defector Reports on the Effect of B-52 Raids

4. Interrogation of a Viet Cong defector has provided information on the effect of B-52 bombing raids on enemy forces. Having experienced two such raids, the defector stated that they had created more fear than casualties. During one attack, for example, only seven of 200 men in his group were killed.

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5. The defector also said that the people present in the areas of tactical bombings and strafings are more terrified of the sound of the jet aircraft than by the actual bombardment. He also stated that of all types of aircraft used by the US and South Vietnamese, the A-1E Skyraider is the most effective because of its slower speed and greater accuracy.

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ANNEX

THE STRUCTURE OF VC/NVA MILITARY REGION 5

1. A recently captured document, reported by MACV, provides some interesting insights into the structure of Military Region 5 (MR 5), the major VC/NVA military command covering the northern half of South Vietnam. The document, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] reveals that the region is divided into four major commands--the main headquarters of Military Region 5 and three other commands which are believed to be subordinate to the main headquarters.

2. One of the anomalies of the Communist structure in this area is that the main headquarters of the region apparently maintains direct control over certain combat units. These include provincial units in Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, and Binh Dinh provinces. Military Region 5 also controls "agricultural sites two and three" which are believed to equate to the former 610th and 620th VC/NVA divisions currently carried in the order of battle. In addition to these combat forces, headquarters MR 5 also has subordinate to it various service and support units including a chemical training school and an artillery unit.

3. The three other commands presumably subordinate to MR 5 are called subregional. They include the northern subregion headquarters, which has subordinate provincial units in Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces. [REDACTED]

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4. The southern subregion headquarters has subordinate provincial units in Phu Yen and Khanh Hoa provinces. This subregion also controls "agricultural site five," which is believed to equate to the 5th NVA Division, consisting of the 95th and 18 "B" NVA regiments, last located in Phu Yen Province.

5. The fourth major command in MR 5 is the western highland subregion headquarters. It has subordinate provincial units in Darlac, Kontum, and Pleiku provinces. This subregion also controls the "Front B3" which is believed to equate to the 630th Division. This particular "front" [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] is one of the largest Communist tactical formations in South Vietnam. "Front B3" probably has three regiments--the 32nd, 33rd, and 66th--of the 630th Division subordinate to it. In addition, it probably also controls several other formations, one of which may be the 88th NVA Regiment. Elements of this "front" have been noted in recent days concentrating in the southwestern Kontum/northwestern Pleiku region, possibly in preparation for some offensive activity against US Special Forces camps in that area.

6. The formation of "Front B3" is a good example of the organizational flexibility of the Communists. They readily juggle units back and forth to form the complement of specific military missions. The Communists have no compunction about abandoning a divisional-level or other organizational structure if a situation or mission changes.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Premier Ky has told a US Embassy officer that he met on the morning of 27 October with six of the dissident southern cabinet ministers, excluding Economy Minister Thanh. Ky said that four of the ministers have agreed to remain in the cabinet after Ky refuses to accept their resignations. The four who will remain are Deputy Premier Nguyen Luu Vien, Social Welfare Minister Lieng, Transport Minister Thuan, and Labor Minister Hung. Of the three ministers who will leave the cabinet, Youth Minister Trieu and Education Minister Truong will stay for a few days until replacements can be found. Economy Minister Thanh will be officially relieved on 28 October, with former economy minister Ton taking over at least temporarily. Ky made no mention of any concessions to the ministers on his part.

2. This resolution of the cabinet problem, if it is in fact finally successful, should take a good deal of heat out of the current political atmosphere by splitting the unity of the dissident ministers. During his conversation with the embassy officer, Ky indicated that he wanted to keep the dissident ministers in the cabinet in order to minimize any further irritation of southern regionalism, which he explicitly recognized as a problem. Other government officials have pointed out that the already instituted plan to release a number of Catholic and Buddhist political prisoners should help to prevent any spread of antigovernment feeling among other influential political elements.

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Constituent Assembly Developments

3. The Constituent Assembly, remaining in session until mid-evening on 26 October to complete its election of permanent officers, elected a northern Catholic, Truong Tien Dat, as its secretary general. Three ballots were required before Dat, a judge from Bien Hoa Province who reportedly had government as well as Catholic backing during the September election, was able to obtain a majority over Ly Quy Chung, a member of the Movement for the Renaissance of the South and a relatively militant southern regionalist.

4. On the third ballot, Dat evidently was supported by the Dai Viet "People's Bloc," whose candidate withdrew at the end of the second ballot. In the election of the assembly chairman, Catholics and the Dai Viet bloc also cooperated in voting for Tran Dien, although they were unable to defeat the more moderate and prestigious southerner Phan Khac Suu.

5. A Cao Dai representative, another member of the Dai Viet "People's Bloc," and an ethnic Cambodian were elected first, second, and third deputy secretaries general, respectively, while a northerner and another Dai Viet member were elected treasurers. The US Embassy is encouraged that no militant southern regionalists or other hard-line government oppositionists were elected to any of the top positions in the assembly.

6. The assembly has now adjourned for several days to allow for the official formation of blocs as established in the assembly's procedural rules. In the future, deputies will be seated according to bloc--a bloc must have at least 12 members. The assembly will probably select the membership of its permanent committees early next week, with most attention focusing on the important constitution drafting committee.

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III. NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There have been a number of indications in recent weeks that elements of both regiments of the 341st North Vietnamese Army Division have crossed the Demilitarized Zone into the eastern portion of Quang Tri Province. A recently captured diary of a soldier from the division's 31st Regiment indicated that his unit crossed the Ben Hai River on 19 September in the vicinity of Cam Lo. While at this location, the diary reported that the unit was bombed by B-52s. Other recently captured documents have indicated that elements of the division's 32nd Regiment were also in Quang Tri.

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US Destroyers Fire on DRV Coastal Craft

4. The US destroyer HANSON on 27 October fired 47, five-inch rounds at a group of four North Vietnamese craft observed moving south along the DRV coast several miles north of the DMZ. The DRV craft were apparently heavily laden with supplies and were making stops along the beach. The destroyer was not able to assess to what extent the

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DRV craft were damaged but reported that all four were beached. A second US destroyer stood by during the incident to return fire from DRV coastal batteries, but the North Vietnamese did not open fire.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS:

There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. A French press agency (AFP) item from Cairo quotes the National Liberation Front representative there as stating on 27 October that the Front intends to set up a government in South Vietnam "soon." This statement was reportedly made in a public interview with an Egyptian newspaper. The Front official did not indicate when "soon" would be, but he did say that the government would be located in South Vietnam and would not be a government in exile. Front officials have previously made similar statements, usually at times when the Front was making a special effort to increase its international stature. To date, however, the Front has never followed through and declared itself a government. Although it calls itself "the only legal representative of the South Vietnamese people," it has never shown itself to have a national apparatus capable of assuming broad governmental responsibilities.

2. The Front has recently renewed its efforts to enhance its international prestige. Within the last few months it has opened an overseas post in Poland, which was agreed to more than a year ago. It also opened an office in Cairo and has pushed for new foreign outlets in Cambodia and France. An attempt is being made to verify the statement attributed to the Front official in his 27 October interview in Cairo and if possible to question him further.

Cuban Leader Comments on Aid to Vietnam

3. Raul Castro hit out at US actions in Vietnam in predictably harsh terms on 26 October at a rally in Pyongyang, where he arrived following his visit to Moscow last week for talks with other Communist leaders. He reiterated Cuba's oft-voiced pledge to send volunteers to Vietnam if Hanoi should request them.

4. Raul had harsh words for "outsiders who meddle in Vietnamese affairs." He declared that "some people, while giving aid to Vietnam, are telling the Vietnamese people, government, and party from outside what to do." He went on to say that only the

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North Vietnamese have the right "to appraise outside aid and to say what they need at their own discretion."

5. The Cuban leader's remarks resemble comments made by North Korean party chief Kim Il-song in a major policy pronouncement on 5 October. The charges against outside interference in Vietnam can, of course, be applied where the shoe fits, i.e., in either Moscow or Peking. The nature of the accusations, however, and earlier appeals for united Communist action against "US imperialism," give a predominantly anti-Chinese flavor to Raul's comments. Raul and Cuban President Dorticos may well go on from North Korea to Hanoi for first-hand talks with the North Vietnamese.

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